

## **SALTON SEA ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING**

**February 27, 2007**

**9:30 – 3:30**

**California State Association of Counties, Sacramento, CA**

### **Welcome and Introductions**

Secretary for Resources, Mike Chrisman, welcomed the Committee Members and led introductions of those present (see attached list).

### **Updates from the Resources Agency**

Secretary Chrisman provided an overview of the last meeting. The meeting was held December 13, 2006 at the Torres Martinez Reservation in Thermal. The Secretary explained the purpose of today's meeting was to build upon the discussions at the December meeting and to discuss the progress of the Preferred Alternative Working Group in detail. In addition, an overview of the comments received on the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR), an outline of the Final PEIR, and potential activities for fiscal year 2007-2008.

### **Public Comments**

No public comments were provided.

### **Update on the Natural Community Conservation Plan**

Kim Nicol, Department of Fish and Game (DFG), provided an update on the Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) and implementation of the mitigation requirements for the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) Water Conservation and Transfer Project. The covered species surveys began in January. The surveys are currently being conducted for agricultural lands using plot survey methodology. The results of these surveys will be available during March and April. Banding of burrowing owl was initiated last week as part of the burrowing owl mitigation measures. The IID Water Conservation and Transfer Project Habitat Conservation Plan Implementation Team is reevaluating the site location for the Managed Marsh Complex.

### **Update from the Torres Martinez Tribe**

Al Loya, Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians, provided an update on the progress of the Coolidge Mountain quarry study. URS Corporation recently completed a report, under contract to the Salton Sea Authority, on the availability, quantity, and quality of rock at the Torres Martinez Reservation/Coolidge Mountain quarry site. This study was finalized yesterday and a copy was provided to the Department of Water Resources (DWR).

Dick Waissar, of the Minerals and Mines Division within the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, provided an overview of the report. The report was based upon field work conducted by URS and historical data. The report focused on Sections 20 and 30, which are part of the Torres Martinez Reservation. The results indicate that there is good quality rock on Section 20. The overall area is known as the Rainbow Rock formation and the rock consists of the Palm Springs Formation. The formation has undergone metamorphism and generally consists of hard rock, making it suitable for rip-rap. Section 20 is approximately 3 miles from the Salton Sea, and upwards of 100 million tons may be available on each Section 20 and Section 30. The report recommends additional testing.

In response to a Committee question, it was noted that preliminary consultation has not been conducted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, nor with the Department of Fish and Game. Mr. Michael Marton, Vulcan Materials, noted that Vulcan has established a relationship with the Tribe. Vulcan emphasizes up front mitigation and long-term reclamation of quarry sites, and believes that the environmental concerns of quarrying at Coolidge Mountain can be mitigated. Biological studies and related environmental analyses would be conducted prior to mining activities. In response to another Committee question, Mr. Marton noted that a year is an aggressive permitting timeframe; however the permitting timeframe may be less intensive as the quarry site is located, in part, on Tribal lands.

The consultant explained that large haul trucks would likely be used to transport materials to the Salton Sea. A conveyor system would likely be difficult due to the size of rock being considered. However, a temporary rail system could be considered. It may take up to a year to mobilize and begin delivering rock to the Salton Sea after all permits and approvals have been obtained.

Based on a comment from a member of the public, Ms. Buchholz noted that the geotechnical analysis conducted for the Draft PEIR evaluated the availability of large diameter rock and not for aggregate. The Draft PEIR also recognizes that quarry conditions need to be re-evaluated at the project-level.

### **Update on U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Feasibility Study**

Mike Walker, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), provided an update on Reclamation's Feasibility Study. Reclamation recently released their summary report and the report is available on Reclamation's website. Mr. Walker noted that the report recognizes that Reclamation has established design and public protection criteria; these may be more stringent than criteria established by other agencies and must be followed for Reclamation projects. The report is the most comprehensive Salton Sea restoration study effort conducted by Reclamation to date.

Mr. Walker provided an overview of the following five action alternatives and the no action considered in the report:

1. Mid-Sea Dam with North Marine Lake (proposed by the SSA)
2. Mid-Sea Barrier with South Marine Lake
3. Concentric Lakes (proposed by the Imperial Group)
4. North-Sea Dam and Marine Lake
5. Habitat Enhancement without Marine Lake
6. No Project

In response to a Committee question, it was noted that Alternative 4 could be constructed in phases.

Mr. Walker noted that the air quality assumptions for the Federal No Project Alternative differ slightly from the No Action Alternative in the State's Draft PEIR. Specifically, the cost assumptions include costs for air quality management of the entire exposed playa under the Federal No Project Alternative. The State's No Action Alternative assumes that some air quality management and associated costs would be borne by the landowner.

Reclamation is currently accepting comments on the report and anticipates issuing the final report in April 2007.

### **Update from the Salton Sea Authority**

Rick Daniels, Salton Sea Authority (SSA), provided an update on the SSA's activities. The SSA has developed a five-year work plan. The plan identifies tasks to prepare environmental documentation, permitting, and design aspects for the selected preferred alternative, and tasks necessary to implement the Early Start Habitat. Activities include initiating project-level environmental documentation, design activities, and working with the U.S. Geological Survey to establish a long-term monitoring program. Additionally, the SSA recently completed an economics benefits assessment. The report found \$1 to \$5 billion per year in non-use benefits from restoring the natural values of the Salton Sea.

### **Review of Comments on the Draft PEIR**

Gwen Buchholz, CH2M HILL, summarized the types and number of comments received on the Draft PEIR. DWR and DFG received comment letters from federal, tribal, state, local agencies, stakeholder groups, and over 30,000 letters from individuals. The State is in the process of responding to these comments.

### **Overview of Final PEIR**

Dale Hoffman-Floerke, DWR, presented an outline of the Final PEIR. The Final PEIR will include a description of the preferred alternative, responses to comments, and changes (edits and errata) to the Draft PEIR. The preferred alternative will be described in Chapter 2 of the Final PEIR. This description will include a description of the process

for selecting a preferred alternative along with a detailed description of the preferred alternative itself. Cost estimates will also be provided for the preferred alternative. The response to comments sections will include the comment letters and response in a side-by-side format. Due to the number of comment letters received, the Final PEIR is expected to be lengthy. The Final PEIR is scheduled to be released by the end of April. A Committee Member noted that the State should attempt to release the Final PEIR as soon as possible to meet the Legislative funding cycle.

## **Identification of the Preferred Alternative**

Dale Hoffman-Floerke, DWR, and Patti Kroen, KROEN Consulting, provided an overview of the Preferred Alternative Process Working Group for development of a process for identification of the preferred alternative. This process includes input from the Process Working Group and input from the technical work groups. The presentation focused on the results of the Process Working Group and the results that were developed by the Habitat and Air Quality Working Groups and the Water Quality Science Panel.

The Process Working Group began by developing a process and identifying attributes to determine a preferred alternative. Attributes were identified based on the requirements in the project legislation along with non-mandated attributes (such as recreation and economic opportunities). The mandated attributes were reviewed and prioritized by the respective technical Working Groups. The technical Working Groups then scored the alternatives with respect to the mandated attributes and provided this information to the Process Working Group. Ms. Kroen noted that the alternatives descriptions were used as they were described in the Draft PEIR, and no refinements were made to the alternatives as part of this process.

Kim Nicol, DFG, reviewed the Habitat Working Group's efforts to score the alternatives. The Habitat Working Group prepared a list of attributes and applied a weight factor to these attributes. Each alternative was then graded for each of the attributes. Based on this analysis Alternative 2 ranked the highest followed by Alternatives 4, 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 7. Two of the attributes were not ranked—wildlife disease risk and ability to support desert pupfish. These attributes were not ranked because it was determined that wildlife disease risk would not vary by alternative and all of the alternatives would need to accommodate desert pupfish. The Habitat Working Group also developed a series of summary statements related to selection of a preferred alternative.

Chuck Keene, DWR, reviewed the Air Quality Working Group's efforts to score the alternatives. The Air Quality Working Group found that the air quality impacts increase with increasing complexity of the alternatives. Alternatives 1 and 2 rated the best from an air quality standpoint. Alternatives 3, 4, and 5 ranked moderate, and Alternatives 6, 7, and 8 ranked the lowest. The Air Quality Working Group also developed a series of summary statements related to selection of a preferred alternative. As identified in the Summary Statements, the preferred alternative would be required to demonstrate conformity with the applicable State Implementation Plan. Additionally, emissions for all

alternatives exceed local significant threshold levels; however, it is recognized that emissions could likely be reduced by the use of less-emissive equipment and/or implementation of more efficient methods of playa dust control. Mr. Keene noted that a variety of attributes were developed for air quality. However, the alternatives were evaluated based on four attributes. Evaluation of the alternatives for the remaining attributes was not conducted because there was not sufficient information on these attributes to rank the alternatives.

Jerry Boles, DWR, summarized the Science Panel's review of attributes related to water quality. The Science Panel considered four water quality parameters to be the most important for restoration at the Salton Sea—selenium, hydrogen sulfide, temperature, and dissolved oxygen. Selenium was determined to be the most important water quality consideration for restoration efforts. The Science Panel recommended that the project-level analysis consider selenium concentrations in sediment when siting habitat areas. Hydrogen sulfide was determined to be a manageable, short-term issue that could be controlled to some degree by nutrient reduction; however, some Committee Members questioned this assessment. Water temperatures were considered moderately important.

Based on a question from a Committee Member, it was noted that the Science Panel differs on the percent of phosphorous load reductions needed to manage hydrogen sulfide production. Additional analysis is needed to identify the amount of load reduction needed and the depth of the Marine Sea under the preferred alternative. Based on a question from a Committee Member, it was noted that it is likely both reduced depths in the Marine Sea and reduced phosphorous loading would be needed to mitigate hydrogen sulfide.

Ms. Kroen noted that the Process Working Group recognized a need to score the non-mandated attributes. During the scoring of these non-mandated attributes, it was noted that all of the alternatives would be compatible with continued agricultural land use, compatible with existing wetlands and refuges, and neutral on camping and off-highway vehicle use opportunities. However, some alternatives would present a higher risk to workers from exposure to hazards.

Ms. Hoffman-Floerke provided an overview of some of the general observations of the attribute scoring process. Early Start Habitat and Shallow Saline Habitat should be included in the preferred alternative. In addition, the non-mandated recreation and economic opportunities could be incorporated in any of the alternatives, but should not be considered as project purposes. Some details, such as air quality management techniques, must be developed during project-level analysis.

Ms. Hoffman-Floerke noted that none of the alternatives rose to the top as a clear preferred alternative that could be technically and politically supportable. Based on the analysis, it became clear that the components were driving the scoring process. The top three grouping of alternatives were as follows: (1) Alternatives 1 and 2 with Saline Habitat Complex; (2) Alternatives 3 and 4 with Concentric water bodies; and (3)

Alternative 5 with the Marine Sea and a Saline Habitat Complex. However, it was noted by a few Committee Members that Alternative 2 was ranked highest in all four sets of attributes and this should be recognized and reflected in subsequent information.

Ms. Hoffman-Floerke noted, and Secretary Chrisman confirmed, that in order to get us to a preferred alternative, we may wish to consider a composite of components. The Committee Members discussed the selection of a preferred alternative in detail as summarized below:

- The ability to finance a preferred alternative is important. It is important to consider partnering and availability of other funding sources.
- Permitting considerations for the preferred alternative should be a priority. There are a few stakeholder groups that will have approval authority over a project.
- Local support should be considered.
- Shallow Saline Habitat and a Marine Sea are both important. Some of the water quality issues associated with a Marine Sea could be resolved at the project-level.

A few Committee Members noted that we are at a programmatic level, and changes can be made during project-level design and analyses. Additionally, a few Committee Members noted that the Committee appears to generally agree on some fundamental issues such as Early Start and Saline Habitat Complex, and may be closer to a preferred alternative than recognized.

Secretary Chrisman suggested that DWR and DFG staff prepare a composite alternative for consideration by the Committee. This composite alternative will be presented at the March 27 Advisory Committee Meeting. A Committee Member requested that information be distributed as soon as possible to allow for review of the materials before the next Committee Meeting.

### **Potential Activities for Fiscal Year 2007/08**

Ms. Hoffman-Floerke provided an overview of the potential activities for fiscal year 2007/08. These activities assume the following: (1) additional legislation would be adopted that selects a preferred alternative; (2) funds would be appropriated for project-level analysis and environmental documentation; (3) a lead agency is identified; and (4) Early Start Habitat could be developed on State lands independent of a preferred alternative selection.

DFG is considering development of Early Start/Demonstration Habitat to address anticipated shortfalls for fish-eating birds in the Saline Habitat Complex. The demonstration project would also be used to test other parameters, such as development of Saline Habitat Complex Cell Type 1, determine selenium risks, and develop design/construction parameters.

Other potential activities for fiscal year 2007/08 include filling data gaps for project-level analysis, inspecting exposed playa along the shoreline, expanded monitoring of ambient air quality to establish baseline air quality information and monitor changes as areas become exposed, and identification of potential sites for full-scale Early Start Habitat.

Based on a question from a Committee Member, it was noted that cost estimates and schedules have not been identified for these potential fiscal year 2007/08 activities.

### **Summary of Action Items**

The next Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for March 27 and will be held at the Department of Food and Agriculture Building at 1220 N Street in Sacramento.

### **Handouts**

Copies of the following presentations and handouts:

- Review of Comments on the Draft PEIR
- Outline of Final PEIR
- Identification of the Preferred Alternative
- Habitat Working Group Summary Statements
- Salton Sea Habitat Working Group Attribute Scoring
- Non-mandated Attributes Matrix
- Air Quality Workgroup, Summary of Statements and Recommendations
- Matrix Results of Air Quality Management Working Group
- Summary Statement from Science Panel Meeting
- Water Quality Scoring
- Potential Activities in Fiscal Year 2007-08

## ATTENDANCE

### Advisory Committee Members or Alternates Present:

Fred Cagle, Sierra Club  
Lee Case, U.S. Geological Survey  
Beth Jines, State Water Resources Control Board  
Michael Cohen, Pacific Institute  
Kim Delfino, Defenders of Wildlife  
Bill DuBois, California Farm Bureau Federation  
Bob Ham, Imperial Valley Association of Governments  
Rick Hoffman, Riverside County  
Al Kalin, Imperial County Farm Bureau  
Julia Levin, Audubon California  
Al Loya, Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians  
Silvia Oey, Air Resources Board  
Dan Parks, Coachella Valley Water District  
Larry Purcell, San Diego County Water Authority  
Jason Rhine, California Waterfowl Association  
Steve Birdsall, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District  
Vincent Signorotti, Geothermal Energy Association  
Pete Silva, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California  
Larry Walkoviak, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation  
Dan Walsworth, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
John Wohlmuth, Coachella Valley Association of Governments  
Nancy Wright, Regional Water Quality Control Board  
Gary Wyatt, Imperial County